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THE MONROE DOCTRINE

By Honorable George F. Tucker

Many views have been entertained as to the meaning of the Monroe doctrine, and as to its claim to a place in the code of international law. The conservatives regard it as a declaration of little value and efficacy; to the devotees of bold and forceful politics it has become a kind of fetish; even a President of the United States asserted nearly twenty years ago that it "has its place in the code of international law as certainly and as securely as if it were specifically mentioned;" and yet, as to its genesis, aim, and validity there can be no room for cavil or controversy. Enunciated over ninety years ago, when Spain was bent on resubjugating her Spanish-American dependencies, which had long before asserted their independence, and when it was apprehended that she was assured of the support of other European powers, the Doctrine has never been sanctioned or adopted by the Congress of the United States, and its place in the code of international law has been strenuously and even bitterly questioned by most of the leading nations of Europe.

And what is this Doctrine? It may briefly be defined as a warning to the governments of the Old World not to establish colonies on, or to extend their political systems to these continents, and to refrain from interference in the affairs of the Spanish-American republics. Conceding that the Doctrine has no place in the realm of international jurisprudence and that it is hardly more than a fiat, we are confronted by the fact that its assertion by this government has more than once received the attention of European powers, and it has been, in a certain sense, recognized by them in the happy adjustment of the contentions which have occasioned its avowal. There are four conspicuous illustrations.

International misunderstandings over a projected waterway at the Isthmus of Panama long preceded the ratification

of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty in 1850. This compact, which was intended to settle a perplexing question only augmented the difficulty, and the discussions and writings to which it gave rise would fill volumes. In the course of time differences were harmonized or contentions withdrawn, and the Hay-Pauncefote treaty has lodged ample power in the American government to construct the Canal; and the bickerings and quarrels of many years are forgotten. During the long period of unrest and disturbance in Cuba, Americans apprehended that Great Britain or some other European power contemplated the acquisition of that island, and Great Britain and France entertained a somewhat similar view as to the intentions of the United States. The two nations urged this country to enter into a tripartite stipulation to the effect that no one of them should obtain possession of the island or exercise any dominion over it. After the rejection of the proposal by this country in 1852, there seemed to be little hope of a settlement of the question, yet now we find Cuba enjoying independence under our own guardianship, and her present condition and her future welfare are matters of indifference to the powers of Europe. On the intervention of the French in Mexico about fifty years ago, the Monroe Doctrine was again invoked. The situation was for a time serious, but at last the invaders withdrew; and ever since no power has assumed to interfere in the affairs of this so-called republic, except the United States itself, now endeavoring through an able, upright and conscientious President to aid the Mexicans in the establishment of a stable government. And, lastly, there is the case of Venezuela, in 1895. The question related to the determination of a boundary line between that country and British Guiana. The feeling engendered between the two nations, parties to the controversy, was intense, if not bitter. However, the question at last reached a definite adjustment, and the incident is now history. These occasions of the so-called application or assertion of the Monroe Doctrine are cited to show that in every instance reason and sense have triumphed, and war has been happily averted.

We are now at the threshold of the future and are asked to

exercise prevision—to suggest how far the Monroe Doctrine ought to apply to prospective incursions of European nations into the territory of Central and South American republics, or to possible interference in their affairs. These questions are difficult to answer, and every case must be treated and settled according to the circumstances creating it, and the disposition and temper of the disputants. It is believed by many that there is little ground for apprehension that foreign powers will endeavor to establish on these shores settlements hostile to democratic institutions or disturb the autonomy of the Spanish-American republics, but if problems relating to land or government or even trade, or the enforcement of pecuniary obligations do come up for solution, there are the most cogent reasons for the exercise of the spirit of accommodation, for the application of liberal construction and interpretation, and for the abnegation not only of the apprehensions similar to those so prevalent at the time of the inception of the Doctrine, but also of jingo sentiments and policies.

The speaker is not inclined to present ideas and formulate rules of his own. It is his purpose rather to ask questions based on governmental conditions, international relations, commercial methods and practices, and the utilization of physical forces for the carriage of merchandise, so radically different from those which obtained or were employed ninety, seventy, or even fifty years ago. We should not forget that at the time of President Monroe's declaration this country had a population of only a few millions, and that her interests were inconsiderable in comparison with those of today, that the Spanish-American countries were emerging from colonial conditions that made the transition to independence and democracy difficult and problematical; that trade between civilized countries was not extensive and was largely limited to merchandise peculiar to an age when wants were few and luxuries little known; that transportation was not yet effected by the agencies which man has since called from latency; that knowledge the world over was the possession of the few, and that such a thing as the education of the masses was hardly contemplated; that racial affinities

and prejudices were marked and prevalent—a fact due to the aloofness of nations, caused in a large measure by slow and imperfect means of communication; that there were few, perhaps no, societies and associations organized to promote the cause of peace and to agitate for settlement of wars and disputes by compromise or arbitration, and that no one dreamed—not even the visionary and enthusiast—of the discoveries and inventions that were to modify the methods of trade and business, augment the wealth of the world, raise the standards of living, bring long separated peoples into closer relations and make possible coöperative efforts to promote amity and good-will among nations.

Is it not a fact that the Monroe Doctrine might possibly be applied today to the detriment of the southern republics in whose interest it may be invoked, and possibly to the discredit of the United States? It is fair to assume that there are only two nations that are likely in any event to oppose or violate this Doctrine or inhibition—Great Britain and Germany. In the past ninety years Great Britain has advanced from the rule of the few to that of the many, so that the subjects of the king enjoy about all the privileges of citizens of our country; she has covered the seas with her shipping, and has developed a colonial system the most remarkable and efficient in the history of the world; she has guarded and guards her subjects in every corner of the globe, and, wherever her flag flies, the lives and property of aliens are accorded the same protection as those of her own. Now is it not probable that, if Great Britain should interfere in the affairs of a Latin-American country, she would establish a system calculated to promote the interests of that country, and not at all inimical to those of the United States? And what system? Not that of the old Great Britain governed by gentlemen, but that of the Great Britain of today governed by the people.

Ninety years ago Germany was a collection of states without cohesion and with a not redundant population. Now regard the aspect of governmental unification, and consider her great advance not only in education and all the activities that go with learning, but in manufacturing and trade and commerce. The growth in population has been marvelous,

and the label "Made in Germany," testifies everywhere to commercial expansion and prosperity, but her territory is hardly sufficient to maintain her constantly increasing numbers, and she naturally seeks other localities for those who are handicapped at home by the struggle for existence. Now if Germany should take over a Latin-American country, would its people be subjugated and deprived of their liberties, or would they affiliate with the conquerors and profit by the appropriation? And how would our own institutions be affected? Would there be ground for apprehension that such an appropriation would be a menace to our democratic government? The speaker does not answer these questions, but he adverts to the fact that there are several million German-Americans; that they have been famed for their indifference to political intrigue, and have been and are equally famed for their diligence, their frugality, their thrift, and their loyalty to their adopted land. So far as is known, they have never attempted to destroy the American republic, but on the other hand have been among the foremost to contribute to its prosperity.

But how about coaling stations and the transference to American shores of the European military system? This suggests other questions. Have not the great powers of Europe all they can attend to in colonial enterprise and expansion, especially since their taking over of the available portions of Africa, under spheres of influence? Would not the maintenance of military strong-holds and coaling stations in Central and South America be an element of weakness rather than of strength? Commanding a large portion of the trade of these southern republics are not Great Britain and Germany, for example, better off than they would be if they were compelled by expensive military and naval measures to guard a commerce which prospers and increases under the protection of the countries with whom it is carried on?

The chief solicitude, perhaps, of the alarmists relates to the Panama Canal. The Clayton-Bulwer treaty has been supplanted by the Hay-Pauncefote convention. Under the direction, and at the expense of this country, the Canal is nearly completed. It is to be neutralized. The United

States may maintain such military police as may be necessary to protect it against lawlessness and disorder; belligerent vessels are restricted in method and activity, and the provisions of the treaty are to apply to waters adjacent to the Canal, within three marine miles of either end. And what is this solicitude? Is it not that the littoral is in peril, that is the shores adjacent to the Canal, particularly on the Atlantic side; that some strong European power may appropriate a part of this littoral, and that the position of the United States may be thus rendered insecure and the Monroe Doctrine made ineffective? Great Britain may be eliminated from consideration, for there is no reason to believe that, after settling the protracted controversy over Isthmian transit, she is going to pursue a course which may weaken the alliance she has entered into to further her own trade. With the English speaking peoples in accord, is there ground for apprehending interference with the littoral, or the establishment of coaling-stations in any parts thereof, or in any of the islands of the Carribean Sea? Is not the logical conclusion that the successful operation of this great waterway will prove such a benefit to the commercial nations of the globe, that no one of them will be disposed to pursue a policy calculated to give umbrage to the others?

A matter which merits attention is the enforcement of money claims. The Latin-American republics have been frequent borrowers of European money-changers, and frequently also the disinclination or refusal to settle has led to threats of coercion. In one notable instance—a little over a decade ago—war was actually resorted to and the American people, misled by the yellow newspapers, were distracted by the bugaboo of an invaded Monroe Doctrine. The case was that of Venezuela. It is not contended that the government of Venezuela repudiated its obligations; in fact, that government only objected to the amount of the claims, and proposed that they be passed upon by a board of Venezuelans, while the creditor nations urged their reference to a mixed commission. The method adopted—the sinking of Venezuelan war vessels and the bombardment of Venezuelan ports—is believed to be one of the first attempts in history to

enforce commercial demands by virtual acts of war. It is to be noted, however, that both Great Britain and Germany disavowed to the American government in advance any intention to acquire territory, the German ambassador assuring the State Department, "We declare especially that under no circumstances do we consider in our proceedings the acquisition or the permanent occupation of Venezuelan territory." The intention to acquire territory was disavowed, but were not the attitude and measures of Great Britain and Germany in a sense an interference in the affairs of Venezuela, and were the interests of South and Central America, and those of the United States in any way jeopardized?

Before dismissing the subject, we feel that the attitude, the views, the preferences and purposes of the Latin-American governments deserve attention, for it may be that today they regard the assumed protectorate of the United States as different from the very acceptable service rendered ninety years ago. Suppose that one of the Latin-American republics desires to hand over its autonomy to a European power or for a consideration to cede to that power a bit of territory for the location of a coaling-station, has the United States a right to set up the Monroe Doctrine, and, if set up, would it prove a deterrent? Without answering this question can we not say that the United States has shown too little general interest in the affairs of her Spanish-American neighbors? The matter of interrelation is one which this country should not ignore, and which means far more to the Latin-Americans than the North American people at present comprehend. During the last twenty years several of our southern neighbors have made such progress, and have so increased their resources, that they are amply able to look out for their own affairs in the event of threatened aggression of European nations. A brief consideration of the respective attitudes of the government of the United States on the one hand and of the Latin-American countries on the other may be profitable. Let us fancy that the United States government opens the colloquy as follows:

"Greetings to our sister republics in Central and South America: We trust that you are well. We are well and are

hopeful of the future. We are at present enjoying great happiness in our remembrances. We recall that ninety years have elapsed since we espoused your cause at a time when you were weak and your European enemies were powerful, as well as hostile to the rights of the people. Your threatened resubjugation to Spain was thwarted by our endeavors, and in a brief period your independence was recognized the world over. For nearly a century we have maintained our tutelage, on four different occasions at least successfully averting the machinations and encroachments of monarchical Europe. We shall continue to regard you as our wards and whenever your liberties are endangered by the threat, or your territory is liable to seizure by the act, of any European government, we shall champion your cause and accord you our support. May peace and prosperity be within your borders, and happiness in your homes. Adieu!"

We will assume that the republics addressed respond in the following phrases:

"Thanks, oh, great and generous nation for the enumeration of your kindly offices, and for the offices themselves. Do not reproach us with discourtesy, if we observe that guardians are supposed to take a continuous interest in their wards. Hence we wonder why your people have not come down to see us during the period of your friendly protectorate. We should qualify the statement, however, for we have been favored with the society of occasional Americans, who masquerade under the cognomen of contractors, and who exact from our governments concessions, which often prove more remunerative to the visitors than to us. Our children wonder why it is that they only see the flag of your country on an occasional embassy or consulate, and why it is almost never seen on vessels in our harbors or at moorings. If the Americans whose preference is for Europe will only honor us with their presence, we will demonstrate the assertion that we can show them the evidences of advanced civilization. We have cities like Valparaiso, Buenos Ayres and Rio de Janeiro, that compare favorably with those of the United States. We have educational institutions of the highest order; we have produced men of great learning and of no

mean repute; we enjoy the advantages, conveniences, and comforts that contribute to the happiness of Europeans and North Americans. We welcome to companionship those of every clime and, with the exception of your own people, they come in generous numbers, and in our cities and settlements are a necessary and component element of our population. For example, Buenos Ayres has over 1,300,000 inhabitants, half of whom are of European birth or descent. Our trade is largely with European countries—particularly with Great Britain and Germany. The foreign merchant does not tell us what to buy, but he studies our wants, and makes his goods and products in the shapes and forms that suit us, and he favors us in matters of payments—not infrequently with long credits. Is it not a fact that you yourselves have been so intent on your home market that you have neglected Latin-American fields, that might have afforded opportunities for profitable enterprise, and that by cultivating these fields you might have brought all the American republics into a union of interest and sympathy and effort? Pardon us, if we remind you that the United States took no part in any Congress with the Latin-American States until nearly two-thirds of a century had elapsed since the declaration of President Monroe. The recent efforts of some of your Chambers of Commerce, and of your advanced men of affairs, to work up markets with us, is highly gratifying. Not the least beneficent result, if their efforts are successful, will be the coming to our shores of many of your people, who, we are sure, will deal with us as fairly as the Europeans have done and are doing. We thank you for expressions of friendship and esteem, and await the approaching day, we trust, when we may extend to your own citizens the felicitations, which we are now endeavoring to pour into your national ear."

It is not easy to advance definite views on an indefinite subject, but it is natural to foresee possible contingencies and occurrences, and to suggest dispassionate treatment of them. Nearly thirty years ago the speaker published a monograph on the Monroe Doctrine, which was intended to be an impartial and colorless presentation of the subject, and

his reason therefor was that the declaration of President Monroe—a proper promulgation for a time when apprehension of interference of European powers in the affairs of the Spanish-American countries was justified—had never been indorsed by congressional action, and had never been accorded a place in the code of international law by the nations on the other side of the Atlantic. The questions asked to-day by the speaker are prompted by the fact that circumstances in the last ninety years have greatly modified the relations of nations, and absolutism—if indeed it exists—no longer alarms the friends of democracy. That the Monroe Doctrine may be again set up as a warning or inhibition, is not improbable, but it is to be hoped that there may be brought, and it is believed that there will be brought to the consideration and adjustment of differences and misunderstandings not the inflamed temper of the jingoist, but the catholic spirit of the patriot.